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THE PLACE OF THE KINDERGARTEN.[1]

THE question of the relation of the kindergarten work to the rest of the child's school life is a question shortly answered if we put it directly. We have only to quote from Froebel's own words whenever he speaks of the inner need of continuity. Indeed, the study of Froebel's life and work seems clearly to show that his interest in the young child was developed gradually by working backward through the successive stages of advancement. This is an experience not peculiar to Froebel, but common alike to educators and to the average grown person. When Froebel had achieved this interest in the period of early childhood, or, as he puts it, in the early life of man, he worked out the forms in detail for the presentation of ideas for this period. His life was too short for him to carry the process throughout the period of adolescence and human growth. It is my purpose, therefore, to assume in this discussion that Froebel's interest in education was such that he would have evolved ultimately as fully formulated a scheme for the whole process of development as he has left for the use of the young child; that throughout this he would have insisted upon his great principle of inner development and continuity, and that consequently in any use of his kindergarten system one must always remember that she is employing a portion only of the plan of a master. She must therefore ask herself, in the application of each part, what relation that part bears to everything which is to follow in the life of the particular child before her.

[1] This paper was prepared for a general introduction to the subject, "What is the Relation of the Kindergarten Work to the Whole Education of the Child?" and read before the Kindergarten Club of Chicago, October, 1902.

So much for the statement of our question, which thus stated answers itself, and brings us thereby to a consideration of any and every element in the constitution of the scheme of education. It is little wonder that we hesitate to open gates which let loose a flood of questions such as might sweep away the answers in which we rest and work. It seems better almost to forget the future, that great source of ideas and answers, whatever mysteries of heaven may be reflected from its surface. To save us from this possible conclusion of humdrum hopelessness, we have in our midst, and growing all the time from the work which holds and drives us, that element of eternity for which we work—the child himself. Through him we learn that if we flee from the impracticable future, 'tis he himself will bring us to it. If we weary with questioning, 'tis he who will heap up interrogations until we must clear them away. We are led on out of our tired and time-worn notions to learn not the lesson of the thing we see, but the lesson of the thing that is, of that which is to be, and to live by means of the tiny voice as the flower lives by the dust of the breeze.

I shall assume, then, the validity of the child himself as the embodiment and defense of this continuity of development, as the treasure-house of human welfare in which we should place only that of which we cannot tire; that for which, if need be, every other possession be given up. With this assumption in mind, we face the practical question in the minds of us all, the question before which I pause: What are we doing to help or to hinder the development of this child? What ideas are we able to interpret for him? What material to mold are we giving him? What end do we help him to attain? Once more, it is only the memory of his questions which can induce us to face any of the possibilities we thus open up to ourselves. I shall ask you to consider two phases of this general question which have of late most impressed themselves upon kindergarten workers. The first is: How far do the present kindergarten method and teacher relate themselves to what has preceded the kindergarten in the life of the child? The second is very like the first: How far can the prescribed gifts and occupations relate to what is to follow in the life of the child?

While Froebel, as do all of us, reached the mind of the child by a progressive working back from the man, it is exceedingly interesting to contrast this process with the development of maternity. Since it is in some contrast of experiences that the first and radical break in the educational process seems to originate and persist, for this reason the frequent and even continual retracing of the psychologic steps in individual history is never wearisome. The average mother being young and inexperienced is little aware of the power and opportunities presented to her. She is largely occupied of necessity in keeping the child clean and warm and fed; her physical strength is not normal, and a certain morbid and one-sided emotional state has probably been induced by her unusual exclusion from social stimuli. Taking the mentor of his being thus at a disadvantage, the child begins his phenomenal career, getting ahead in the world at a rate too rapid for the mother to realize, still less to compete with. As Froebel shows again and again, we cannot give nor prevent experience by telling, and one can scarcely believe that even with the most careful preparation the young mother could be made sufficiently aware of the progress which she alone is to witness intimately, to keep her in conscious control of all the manifestations of the growing soul and body. Whether or not she could, she does not as yet acquire such consciousness in any degree of clearness. She is, if a good mother, necessarily content with that larger knowledge and feeling that completely satisfy her in the healthy child, the feeling of general well-being and continuing interest in watching the evolution of the highest ideals of human love and intelligence. Gradually and almost unconsciously the principles which she laid down in advance for her guidance fall into disuse. They do not fit the case. The young individual before her ignores or even resents the presence of her ideals, and to her surprise she sees them becoming mere ghosts from a past which she herself is relinquishing. The pleasant memories of psychologic or kindergarten theories, even ethical standards, continually merge into daily activities. When she has time to stop and think, she wonders, and often with no answer to her questions.

The curiosity of the young one is meantime penetrating to unexpected regions, and all at once he has his own environment, his personality. I feel that no disrespect is shown to motherhood in saying that the first break in education occurs at this point, if we can name a point at which growth reveals itself. His conscious "environment" seems to exist all at once, to the onlooker, but not so to the baby. He has by a power long since forgotten by the grown-up, constructed for himself a consciousness no less complete and entire than that of the larger person, although it is less comprehensive in its scope. Now, the most that can be done by the mother is to regulate within her own boundary the tools for this great creation. Her field is measured by the length of her arm, at the outside by the length of her vision. It is the period when the child needs to be let grow. As for the spiritual element in her mind, the young one has done what he likes with such plastic stuff. The best she can do is to look ahead and try to see whither he will carry his new possessions, and whether she can follow. The time has not come for the younger mind to look back for her. There comes a call like that of old, "Let my people go;" and she obeys.

Am I mistaken in thinking that it was the preparation for this departure into a new world that Froebel desired? No one will, I believe, deny that the meaning of the "Mother Plays" is simply this, that they are an attempt to simplify and to clarify this passing out from the small center of the narrow and intense life of the family where the instinct and the emotions are the guides to action, into the larger and more diffused activities which demand intellectual control. The time when instinct and simple emotion have control in human life is short, but curiously enough it is during this time that intelligence has its most rapid growth; in a sense, its most important growth. Intellectual ends are set up independently during this formative period. The child chooses what he likes and dislikes on lines of his own selection. No amount of either indulgence or correction can do away with this situation. Rarely, if ever, is the mother able to see fully and to account for its beginnings. She

is puzzled by an opposition whose origin she knows not, an independence along lines which she did not lay down, whose direction she cannot see. Because her intellectual confusion over the new situation is so great, and also because the present importance of the opposition is so slight, she probably relegates the whole matter to the background of her consciousness, and relies upon the affectional and inherent ground of relation to her child. It is conceivable that education may reach a point in the future when the unity of intellectual life of the child and the mother will be as unbroken as is the affection developed from day to day. It is hardly possible to say, however, that that ideal of education is often seen at the end of the first four years of life. Teachers will be as ready to grant that point as will mothers to see the next gap which we have to bridge.

To what then shall we trust if we are to accept average conditions, and make the best of them? Simply to a certain selective power in the young one himself, remembering that we have not as yet defined that power, and, further, to our own faith in the instinctive control, which does as we have seen transcend any external barriers which may be put in its way.

The first act of choice, the break which it causes, have given an experience consequent upon independent activity to the young human being when first he comes to school. He has the habit already formed of judging for himself. He has a method of thinking, as inevitably his own as was that of the mother, or that of other care-taker who made him see his own way by compelling him to react against her way. Supposing now the teacher into whose hands he passes to be of the best sort, but that only imperfect, what sympathy and what conflict are we likely to find? First of all, of course, a love for the child and a belief in his aims. Also a preparation for understanding the child reached by a process inverse to that of the mother's. Other things being equal, a less enriched personality from the standpoint of human contact and evolution. We find, on the other hand, a finer observation of the idiosyncrasies and a truer sense of the social value of the child, and of the eliminations and enrichments consequent upon his placing in a new society.

As a matter of course, a teacher must begin by choosing between the many points she may find in her own and the general experience which will appeal to and be understood by her new class of children, for we now have children instead of the child to consider. It is not, therefore, the teacher alone who is to instruct. She has also to face the problem of what the children in the class are to learn from each other. Naturally it is difficult to make a choice among the many points of contact possible between the teacher and the child, between her consciousness of what is to come and the whole power the child has already gained in self-expression. That which the mother has learned from day to day, and night to night, in every motion and feeling of a being most sympathetic to her own, the teacher must now presuppose and use, however different may have been her own habits to those of the mother.

At such a point we might again give up discouraged, if it were not that necessity requires us to follow the child. To teach a child if he were really unknown would be a sacrilege, impossible to anyone in her right mind. If the teacher can follow, there is a break no more impossible than the one between the child and the mother. If the teacher assumes a knowledge of the child, the case is lost—there begins at once that thwarting of the everlasting right which we call arrested development. The helplessness of the young one is as great as the power of the teacher. There is no situation in life more important or more delicate than that period during which the child is discovering for himself his new relationship, as he surely will if he does not become hopelessly confused. This discovery must involve every intellectual process in its establishment, and the teacher, more than anyone else, originates these processes, whether she knows it or not. In the last analysis it is impossible for the teacher to imitate merely, simply to pass on a lesson or method devised by another; just as impossible as for her to assume that any one child is exactly like any other. The child is always ready to help, to idealize anything she may do or give, to create, but she may be sure that in some way or other he will discover her own method; if not directly

and because she gives it to him, then in spite of her. Because she is one, and the children are many, because of the greater flexibility and naïveté of the child-mind, the child is likely to have an even better practical appreciation of the teacher's ways than she has of his. He will quickly see whether she herself has an inner knowledge of all that she gives to him, and whether his own knowledge relates to her method of presentation. He will assert himself against the dogmatism of mere assertion. If he is strong enough to react in spite of her failure to intelligize a lesson, he will in time create a new method of his own; and the split between teacher and child will be concealed under social forms, while he goes his way as surely as she goes hers, and nobody any the wiser. If, on the other hand, he does not possess a vigorous intellectuality, a repression deeper than manners will ensue, a resentment, a beginning of bitterness and pessimism, which is the inevitable consequence of a loss of faith in ideas. Both types of children are conscious, to a degree, of the fact that the teacher had not faith enough herself in the ideas she is trying to transmit to make them a common meeting-ground in which she and they become one.

Starting with obvious differences resulting from apparent conditions of life we may run over a scale of intervals scarcely distinguishable, but each one distinct in itself and forever sounding itself in its search for harmony. Each note the teacher must hear and attune. She cannot know nor foresee these differences, but she must always be open to finding them out. If she asks how she can find them out, the value of the reply is so meager as not to be worth including in the situation. The child will show her, her sympathy will show her, she will know how; and if she does not, she should seek some other vocation in life.

Doubtless we could, any of us, fill a book with the things of all sorts which children experience not included in the cataloguing of the so-called periods of development. The members of a family that live in one room all take for granted a knowledge of each other which, if gained by the family which inhabits a mansion, is concealed as a forbidden thing. Similar is the contrast between the city and country child regarding the phases and circumstances of external nature.

Perhaps we may state the danger in this way: We must not underestimate the intelligence of the child — by intelligence meaning his training and whatever power he has acquired in judging and discriminating — in short, his experience: for he has an experience all his own, and he will not tell you what it is, and no one knows its full nature. This does not mean that he has a new kind of mental activity, like a third leg to help him walk, but simply that he has already acquired that individualizing of consciousness which is as distinct as is your own. He knows what he knows.

If he has counted and measured with his pace the spots on every carpet in his father's house, we must be careful how we put him before a table and instruct him in the relation of one and one, one square and one square, two squares and two squares; he may be bored and feel slighted. It cannot be repeated too often that children have their own method, their own mental ways at four years of age. It is the business of the teacher to find out these ways, and through them to lead the child to other ways. It may be possible to wrong a child by trying to give him by means of a gift, a knowledge of the three dimensions of space of which he gained complete control at the age of nine or twelve months by going up and down stairs, or by climbing in and out of a high chair. Only a teacher who has watched closely has seen the two-year-old baby feeling of the door casings, the chairs, whatever he can reach, telling stories to himself about what he finds out, getting a knowledge of materials, organizing that knowledge, all in a way we do not know and never can know except as we learn it from the child. The teacher who ignores the possibility of that knowledge, who forgets any experience gained from the days of the nursery world, is assuredly doing harm through the gifts and their use, as the teachers of our grandmothers did harm with the book. She is turning the energy which the child should use, and would use if left to himself, in gaining new ideas, into the monotony of mere repetition. Whether by means of the fight on the corner, by the figures on the wall paper, by the bouncing of his ball, by the happy combinations made in play with his brothers

and sisters, the four-year-old has begun his education. He has viewed and judged situations; and taken altogether these situations for the average teacher are of endless variety. She must then make use of the selective power which we trust she has not lost, and at once set up a common working principle with the child. She classifies, not because her intelligence is different in its nature from the intelligence of the pupil, for we are all learners, but because it is wider in its scope, and because for her own convenience, and the convenience of all the children, she must choose and eliminate.

To illustrate this point the question so frequently discussed in the kindergarten plans for the last few years will serve. I refer to the question regarding the kinds of material and the resultant methods of using them. Shall they be free, so-called, or organized? Such a question appears to be simple and natural, rather forcing itself on every teacher who goes in thought beyond the lesson form. It is impossible, in considering the world over against the child, not to consider the child as over against the world, his coming world. Immediately, then, we face the question as to the qualities of this world, and, willing or unwilling, we make at once the large and easy division between nature and art, between free and organized material. What shall we say regarding the two great possibilities opening here? Shall the teacher walk into the open air, and say to her pupil: "Behold nature, her plastic and variable surfaces are yours to mold, to break, to define." Or shall she lead the child quietly to a sheltered spot and say: "Here are the constructions which history records; the forms which you are to improve, the manifestations of mind; these you can further analyze and increase and enrich." Since she must choose, which of these two shall it be? The child is nature, he is soft and pliable, and therefore he accords with nature and inclines to begin at once there without the telling. But a short trial shows her that he has a long journey to retrace before he sees the source of his things. He was busy setting up a line of operations all his own during those first months when he strengthened his legs against the clothes, and taught his eyes and his feet to follow the lines

of the casings and carpets, and his hand to build castles and towers with wood, and to feel the flying ball.

Is she to conclude from this habit which amounts often to a preference for mathematically constructed objects, that these objects alone will satisfy? Or is she even to conclude that such objects are to be the means through which she is to lead her charge back to nature? No wonder a teacher is tempted to conclude that by beginning at the standpoint of the present achievement, that is of the finished result, she may go back and thread the labyrinth, learn the path through which man has walked. Scarcely, however, has she reached this conclusion when she finds the limit of the youthful interest in the line, the block, the form. It becomes evident that the elusive being before her cares nothing for what has been, and therefore is; he suddenly demands the whole formless mass of matter to reconstruct for himself. So strong is the evidence in this latter direction that we have plans for kindergarten instruction based almost exclusively on the idea that simple nature accords fully with the child's attitude. In this connection we have the authority of the late Colonel Parker: "It seems logical that real or natural forms should be studied first, that they are more adapted to the crude concepts of the child."

Thus appears to me to have arisen quite naturally and from living conditions, that difference of opinion, apparently so wide, as to the two points of approach to the young mind. But why regard the distance between these two as so great or so fixed? In the life of any person of school age, both these sorts of experiences already exist and persist. Form has been already defined and applied. Nature has been sought and known and loved and made over. What more can we need or say than that the method must and certainly does, whether we wish it or not, lie in the proper adjustment of these two lines of approach? And further, that the propriety of the adjustment must be found by the teacher herself from the experience of the child. For this thing is sure to happen. The pupil will seek and in some way find that which his world and mind demand. If he is restricted as to material, or so-called subject-matter, in his class, he will instinctively and

energetically find what he there misses. Missing further the assistance he needs, that which he finds for himself will often remain to him in large measure unused and confused. There is no doubt we may justly make use of certain habits as far as they can be defined, and assume a common experience to which and from which to work. If the mind is so civilized as naturally to lend itself to the contemplation of mathematically constructed materials, no one can question the right to use that inherent power of adaptation provided it is used consecutively and evenly. If also the religious and philosophic habits are so settled that symbolic interpretation of natural forces and forms is spontaneous, the same right exists for making use of these habits. If the child, however, is repeating a phase of human development which demands for its essential satisfaction the crude and plastic matter of which he is a part, in so far are we not justified in asking him to use or interpret for our own purposes the forms and ideas which have resulted from the slow sophistication of adult life? Any result from a lesson conceived on such a false basis must necessarily be unrelated and harmful to the balance in the mental equipment of the child. The effects of such unrelated activity and struggle become more and more evident as the years go on, but the kindergarten teacher can ill afford to believe that this danger does not exist at the very beginning of school life.

To quote again from Froebel: "We teach our children without having aroused an inner want for the instruction, and after having repressed everything that was previously in the child." The young child enters the school with this inner want either encouraged by fostering, or by reaction to some deficiency in the family life. Rarely has it been crushed in a child before the kindergarten age. It is obviously, then, the first duty of the kindergarten teacher in looking ahead to see whither she and her charge are tending; to look also without ceasing upon every impress of the past as an index of the nature of the child, to be used and modified consistently with the motive of their origin and of their aims.

The second question which pertains to the continuance of the

school life cannot yet have a definite answer. The idea involved in Froebel's plea for German ideas, and for German education would seem to have great value in the country where individuality has acquired more rather than less force than it had in Germany. To continue and to expand the home training one must understand it in its endless variations. In order to continue and expand the kindergarten training, it must by its nature have related to the continuous life and wholeness of the child. Perhaps it is not within the scope of this introduction to the subject of the year to do more than state this question. To analyze the method of the kindergarten from the standpoint of higher criticism is doubtless your aim in proposing such a subject. This requires a thoughtful study, not a sudden throwing aside of forms which one may conclude do not express fully or justly an ideal of life or freedom in which she herself may have entire faith. If one has faith in the principle of growth, one does not continuously pull up by the roots, but rather trusts to the safe and slow manifestations of change as a basis for further change. Such changes can be assured only by introducing proper conditions of growth, and for these conditions eternal vigilance and effort are required. Before us at each step are two temptations: reaction, immediate self-assertion or mere conformity. It is easy to see and find fault with the effects of the former in our so-called new education at the present time. It is easy to see also that, if all life and education were free and spontaneous, conformity would not mean repression.

"Our speech," says Froebel, "is like the book out of which we have learned it; we cannot give outward form to what we say." The history of the kindergarten for the last thirty years in this country appears to verify certain criticisms which Froebel made on German education in his time. The adoption of forms and methods foreign to the German people was continually deplored by Froebel. "Shall we never cease stamping our children like coins and adorning them with foreign inscriptions?" he says. It is not presumable in making these criticisms he wished to assert that all development must come

from self-made principles and from local conditions. In all life, as well as in all learning, the juices of the past are feeding new growth. Whatever has filtered through the generations, and been assimilated, and lives in the present, is ours, no matter whence it comes. It is the essence, the idea, the underlying method, which thus becomes universal, and is transmissible from century to century. At present I venture to say we have more insight both by inheritance and by nature than art, more philosophy than power to shape; more material than we have learned to control. Doubtless the enigma of art will gradually be read and a formulation of educational principles, more simple and more universal than anything experienced up to this time, will follow. We cannot, however, be safe in assuming that the imperfect formulation peculiar to any time and any people is, or will ever become, universal in its application. The changes made in the scheme of kindergarten work up to the present time have been made because some details of the scheme did not relate to the needs of the child. However appealing and inspiring the metaphysics lying behind the gifts and occupations, we have, as a matter of fact, gradually found it desirable to simplify and even to discard many of the exercises which were given to children in the early days of the kindergarten. Froebel was continually modifying these exercises during his lifetime, and it seems only consistent with his principle to expect further modifications in a country so different from his. It is not too much to claim that the complete form of education must be the work of the artist as well as of the philosopher. The universal principle lies not in something remote from experience, but rather in the adaptation of the form of expression to the common activities of every day. We do not need to worry about the preservation of great truths. Being the greatest forces in the world, they are thus beyond the need of temporary support. The clothing in which we dress them is as likely to conceal their loveliness as to reveal it.

Suppose in the question before us, we humbly follow the logic as best we may of Froebel himself, do we not see at once that the movement of a little mind, in the first years of school life, must be steady in the direction of his future, simple in rela-

tion to surroundings and precedence, spontaneously arising from activities common about him? We place the child in the school to develop, not to isolate him socially. His intelligence is by no means a hothouse plant to be forced to a profusion of blossoms too delicate for the winds of every day. His intelligence is experience, and we can enlarge it, give better means of enriching it, nothing more.

Parallel with the danger of underestimating the power of the young child, there runs all through the years of school the danger of overestimating his ability. The reason for dropping much of the minutiæ and of the symbolism of the German kindergarten has been that these were too remote. They presuppose a state of mind more sophisticated than seems to be found in the average American child. The mistake of taking from the future is not different in kind from that of robbing the past. In fact one effort on the part of the teacher may often accomplish both of these results, and leave the struggling mind either in a state of convulsive irritation, or in one of apathy. A few such efforts generally give to the pupil the power of absenting himself from the present with a nicety and skill which show judgment in an unexpected direction. The teacher who filled a paper on number work in developing a method of teaching the number one to seven-year-old children was belittling experience with number at first hand. She was, at the same time, creating an abstraction great enough and misty enough to frighten away any ideas from any child. She was assuming in this immature mind an interest in, and a power over, the metaphysical phases of number concept which put her entirely outside the world in which the child lives. Any such lesson must be harmful to the balance of the childish mind. It is putting the hammer of the giant in his tiny hand and expecting him to work. It is at the same time asking him to discount his previous acquirements in such a way as to make him distrust his experience as a whole. It is drawing on the future, putting in his way material for which he is not ripe, and is sure to bring on that attitude of indifference which is characteristic of that unfortunate being known as the *blasé* kindergarten child.

If we assume the power of re-starting a child in his intellectual method, we at the same time, in most cases, assume that into this fresh start the child will put a content heretofore unthought by himself. Taking this to be the honest purpose of the teacher, if she annihilates what natural means of support the little one has already gained, let us ask ourselves just what happens when we introduce a new method to one not yet fully conscious of his first way of thinking. The first step in the process is obviously the effort on the part of the child to discount his entire consciousness. Concrete and simple as that may be, his consciousness is his personality. It is what he has seen, felt, touched, smelled, and, to an extent, worked into a whole.

That doctrinaire teaching which interprets the child's thoughts and activities as fragmentary is a mere superficial judgment of some phases of the child's expression. If we call the mental life of the child fragmentary, it is conceivable that we have a right to take out a piece here or a piece there, and put a more beautiful piece into the mosaic. The greater mind thus becomes the only judge of beauty, but the engrafted beauty supposedly soon unites itself and grows a new kind of decoration for the little mind. If, on the other hand, we assume that personality is ever the same in its divine essence; that even the sucking child has its wholeness, and the schoolboy a larger possession, that they add to their world in a way we no longer know, that they are still one each to himself and with himself: if we grant this wholeness of nature to the child, it is logically inconsistent to assume the right to shape for him and to direct for him the materials and motions on which he forms himself, whether these elements of life be spiritual or sensuous. We cannot say that our fragment is not his whole. If we do so, we are not only overestimating his intelligence but discounting his experience and weakening his confidence in himself. We are affronting that wholeness of which he is a legitimate part. We are underestimating an apparently small experience which is his vital and magnetic whole.

From the nature of this subject, and the circumstances, there is no chance here for doing more than to raise questions—a

task at best somewhat unsatisfactory; on the other hand a task which has some encouragement in view of the fact that these questions are brought out at the beginning of a year of discussion of special points of work; of encouragement also, in the fact that this is a body of workers who will find tests and applications for any conclusions arrived at.

If I am wrong in suggesting these two dangers in the use of the kindergarten method, I have only in closing to ask pardon. If, however, there is a possible question as to the relativity to American conditions of this German scheme in all its details, and even in some of its underlying philosophy, we can do no harm by bringing up the question. Whatever is true we know will stand; whatever contradicts, or thwarts, the inner development of the American child, throughout all his school and his world, must go, not because we wish it, but because America is not Germany, our generation is not another; because from the processes of life are continually growing the forces that determine new processes.

If changes are to come, and are coming through the general social pressure, into the work here being discussed there is certainly no one present who desires not to be ready for such changes, and to look into the reasons for their coming.

ALICE C. DEWEY.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
LABORATORY SCHOOL.